DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 545 CS 205 087

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TITLE A Comparison of Creative Dramatics in Sequence and the Advantages of Improvisational Drama in Teaching Children.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 27p.; Report prepared at the University of Arkansas

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Objectives; Cognitive Development; Cooperation; *Creative Dramatics; *Creative Expression; *Drama; Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; Sequential Approach; *Student Development; Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Improvisation

ABSTRACT

Based on the belief that improvisational drama is superior to the traditional approach of sequence drama, this paper tells some advantages and methods of improvisational drama and compares the two methods with respect to educational goals. After defining sequence drama (a sequence of activities typically beginning with interpretive movement and moving eventually to the creation of original dramas) and improvisational drama (drama without a script), the paper notes several values of improvisation, suggests methods for beginning improvisational drama with children, presents an anecdote that shows how improvisational drama succeeded with a first grade class that had a great deal of trouble working together, tells how improvisational drama can be used to develop the self, and suggests ways a teacher can field ideas from children without destroying their enthusiasm. It then presents a comparison of the way sequence and improvisational drama make use of a number of elements of drama (including script, pantomime, movement, and character) and the way they contribute to a number of educational goals (including sensory, language, and thought development; creativity; and self-discovery). The paper concludes that improvisational drama involves all the elements of sequence drama while encouraging a greater amount of creativity, thinking, commitment, and feeling. (GT)

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A Comparison of Creative Dramatics in Sequence and the Advantages of Improvisational Drama in Teaching Children

Basic creative drama texts have usually suggested that the best approach in using creative drama with children is to start with non-improvisational forms of drama, such as awareness of the senses, followed by exercises in movement, pantomine, mood, character, story dramatization and finally to improvisational drama. The rationale for starting with this type of "sequence drama" is that it allows the child to gain an understanding of the world by beginning with simple sense awareness and moving to more complex forms of drama. Improvisational drama is considered by most creative drama teachers and by most other teachers who use drama in their classes to be the most difficult to use successfully in the classroom. Improvisational drama is often suggested as the last step in the creative drama process. In many instances improvisational drama is never attempted because of the risk the teacher must assume in using this form of drama.

The position of this paper is that the traditional approach of sequence drama is too limited and that improvisational drama is a superior educational tool.

Definitions

In defining terms we often find the same label placed on many different forms of drama. The basic catch-all in

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this country seems to be "creative dramatics." This label represents everything from simple movement exercises to something just short of the traditional evening in the professional theatre. The latitude of names and titles, in this author's opinion, is most justified since one of the basic tenets of drama with children is to create a situation whereby many different ideas can be expressed. In short, drama assists in developing creativity and helps the teacher and children learn about life in the affective domain.

Sequence drama refers to a traditional "sequence" use in drama to develop the child's ability to perform a role. The most typical approach in sequence drama is to begin with simple interpretative movement (such movement might include animal movement). The remaining sequence includes interpretative movement and simple characterization, abstract movement, movement with attention to mood, mood interpretation, characterization, plot development, incidental dialogue, and a combination of all the above hopefully ending in the ability of the child working with others to create a drama. Sequence drama often assists the teacher in implementing story dramatization, that is, in acting out such children's stories such as "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." Story dramatization is often referred to as scripted drama, or drama based on material that exists in written form.

Improvisational drama is drama without a script. This form is usually more meaningful, in that a child is given opportunity to use his own life experience to communicate and

and explore his world. What improvisation does is simply to reverse the process of sequence drama. In an improvisation the child works in a situation that is being created while it happens.

The Value of Improvisation

Improvisation allows the teacher and the child to experience directly the learning situation. In many cases the situation might be the development of the child; how he/she functions in the world. Creative drama exercises such as concentration, pantomine, movement, mood, characterization, and story dramatization may not be centered on life experiences as is improvisational drama. Such drama may lead the child into a "performance drama," that is, to a drama being acted more for others "to see," than for the benefit of the child's own development. In sequence drama the child is more likely to be concerned with pleasing an adult, his peers, or in general performing for an audience. Thus, the child will probably be more concerned about giving a false presentation of character, feeling, mood, etc., than he is about experiencing the situation that the drama is presenting. In improvisational drama, walking and talking like old men, women, or princesses is not important. Experiencing the situation or the idea of the drama is what will most benefit the child. As the child takes the role of the old man he might better be in a position to experience the feelings of lonliness, greed, or whatever other purpose the specific drama might be attempting. Two concepts are important here. First, in sequence drama the leaders runs a high risk of asking children

to work in ways that they may already be capable of doing. For example, some children in group concentration exercises may be capable of doing simple interpretative movement which in effect wastes time for both the child and teacher. Second, in improvisational drama the goal is the internal feeling that is contained within the drama. The response the child gives need not be a satisfactory "imitation" to an observer or teacher.

How Improvisational Drama Works with Children

Based on the author's experience, it is most helpful to begin the first session with a group of children with no preparation. That is, do not come prepared for a certain lesson for the children to learn. Lesson plans, the foundation for many teachers, tend to inhibit the spontaneous nature of drama. In not preparing for the first lesson, one is ready to learn the maturity level of the group and with luck to gain some insight into the personalities of the children. In this way one will not force a false sense of value upon the children and can better determine their developmental level. The children, on the other hand, are more willing to share their interests, thus helping create a story situation that is uniquely their own. Once the children have suggested and worked on a drama, one is able to determine how their interests can be structured into a drama which will encourage self discovery, group interaction, change, and hopefully growth. Growth or the development of the child is at the

center of drama in education. Improvisational drama is not concerned with how a child performs in a concentration exercise, a theatre game, or even how he or she might deal with the problems in a story. The purpose of improvisational drama is to create a living experience for the child, not to have a child running home after a busy drama day at school and exclaim to his or her mother, "I was a rat today at school. We ran like rats today." While assuming the character of a rat might not be harmful to the child, it generally does not present the child with a situation that is based on a real living experience. In improvisational drama the child is hard at work creating situations that are real to him or her and that process demands creativity, group interaction, decision making, problem solving, evaluation, and an awareness of this process.

In improvisational drama the leader should begin the class in a position of authority that is very low keyed. The child is not put under any pressure to begin to perform. After limited warm-up exercises, such as the mirror concentration exercise described by Violia Spolin in her book Improvisation for the Theatre, the child has cleared his mind of other matters and is ready to create a drama. The teacher simply begins by asking the children what they would like to do. Suggestions are placed on the blackboard (if the children read) and a topic is agreed upon. The story begins with all the children participating in the drama. The children merely assume an attitude that is appropriate to the role in the

drama. Some children are highly motivated and are very convincing in their "role" while others are barely into the drama. No pressure is placed on the children to be the character, to move like, speak like, or think like the character. The child are themselves in a situation that demands a total group effort to solve a complex series of problems and hopefully to gain self awareness. The children remain themselves and this gives the teacher an excellent opportunity to observe behavior and to help individual children deal with the group and the other individuals in a more affective way. For example, the teacher might observe that one child is shy, but would like to participate is a more active sense. The teacher can them place the child in that capacity, "Sara, will you take care of the baby today," or "David, you lead the hunters." If a child dominates the group, the teacher can easily place that child in a role which restricts such behaviors, "Andy, you did such a good job as chief yesterday, let's see how you can do as one of the hunters today."

To site a more personal example, I might share with you one specific improvisational drama that was successful in working with a class that had a great deal of trouble working together. It was a class with a wide range of social and mental abilities. The teacher explained to me that she had great deal of difficulty in getting the children to cooperate with each other and that she felt she had not made much progress. Each session became more difficult and frustrating

for me. Many children in the group found it necessary to push, pull, and argue about who was sitting in the right or wrong chair. They constantly violated each other's space and in general had little regard for each other. Crying was a common experience in the drama lesson and in the regular classroom activities. My problem was how to get a diverse group of first graders to respect each other and work together? I reluctantly called for suggestions for an improvisational drama. Their suggestions varied, but most fell into a pattern that could be labeled quite simply--violence. (Violent themes are apparently quite common and tend to be frightening to all of us as we wonder what television, movies, and the local news are teaching our children). Operating on the assumption that violence was a common interest for the group, I decided to use the suggestions that the class offered. After a good deal of discussion, we decided on a plane crash. I asked if I could be the pilot and they readily accepted me as their leader. As the pilot, I was now in a position to keep the drama on the right track. We had a dramatic take-off, and as teacher I asked, "What would you do if you were in an airplane?" Several children assumed the role of passengers and began reading magazines, eating and drinking--in spite of the fact that many of these children had not been on an airplane. Other children served as stewardesses and still others assisted the pilot. Our crash was a dramatic one and I knew that the important aspect of our drama was about to begin. As the pilot I asked if anyone was hurt.

Immediately a few of the children assumed the role of the injured passengers. This created the need for medical personnel who began to materialize. Next we were ready to investigate the "strange island" we had landed on. As fate would have it, the pilot was injured and was not able to move about the island. He was able, however, to sit, be attended by various medical personnel, and watch and assist the drama. Children began to pair off into groups and look for food and shelter. To make a long drama short, the children were forced by the drama situation to work together. As teacher my task was to keep the drama going and to assist the children in working together. As the tension began to weaken (all drama must have tension and conflict, and in this can our tension was being lost on a desert island) I helped the children think of a new tension that would block the problems they faced, namely how to survive and get off the island. Again, the children were concerned with the immediacy of the plane crash and survival. What they did not realize was that they were learning how to work together. In effect, they were living a very important life experience. As teacher I was now in a unique position to continue working on the specific purpose of the drama. While the children were working hard "in role" to survive on the island and to work on solutions on how to get off the island, I continued to concentrate on ways to keep them working together--sharing food, finding shelter, assisting each other as the threat of wild animals and other unkowns surfaced.

Improvisational drama tends to open the inner world of the child to the teacher. The teacher can more readily see a

a child's inner thoughts and feelings by the way the child reveals himself in the drama. This new insight into the child gives the teacher increased knowledge facilitating the child's development and for structuring the learning situations.

The use of improvisational drama to develop the self is of major importance. Drama can be used equally affectively to deal with a wide range of subject matter and it is being used with much greater frequency today. In improvisational drama the child is given an opportunity to deal with the major ideas of a learning situation. For example, in the study of history the child can experience the horrors of child labor of the pride of being an American Indian. In literature, the child can experience the fear Tom Sawyer felt during his terrifying encounter with the Old Indiana or, just as easily, delight of the humorous adventure of "The Priate Don Durk of Dowdee." In short, there is no academic area that can not use drama as a way of studying and experience the subject. Many drama instructors feel that science is a more difficult area in whic to use creative drama. However, students might work on a drama that deals with the emotions and the trials and tribulations Edison experience in developing the electric light.

In discussing improvisational drama, teachers often assume that anything might happen and utter chaos will follow. While it is true that the good teachers will allow the maximum number of the ideas from each child to be utilized in the drama, it is also true that many of the ideas will be impractical. Ideas can be fielded without destroying the enthusiasm that the child brings to the drama. For example, a teacher can easily explain that Billy's suggestion is a good one, but won't quite work in this

situation. Teacher can also be quite honest with the children and dismiss many ideas by simply asking, "Would that or could that happen in this situation?" It is surprising how the children themselves will reach the logical answer. If one child is persistent in giving immature suggestions or answers, it is often the child's peers who will bring him/her into line. One last point that I would like to make about the success of our "airplane crash drama" is the subject of violence. It goes without saying that many of the children were prepared to enter the plane with an arsenal of weapons. As the pilot it was simple to send them through the terminal of the airport so that they could be checked "by the machine" (machines seem to have more authority in our society than do people) so that no one could possibly carry a weapon. Immediately after the crash I quickly stepped out of the pilot role, and as teacher I reminded the children that they had no weapons and that any problems that arose would have to be solved without the aid of guns, knives, clubs, etc. This presented a great problem to a group of children who often solve their problems with physical aggression. In their sociodramatic play on the playground, most of their play ended with many inventive forms of murder. Now through drama they were practicing, in a non-threatening way, alternative solutions to human difficulties.

What then follows in this short paper is a comparison of creative drama and improvisational drama with respect to the goals toward which teachers often work. This comparison

illustrates what happens with children when using the sequence approach and when using the improvisational approach. This list is certainly not definitive, but it does demonstrate some of the advantages of improvisational drama.

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
Often requires a script or some other formal form, e.g., mood, story, music, props to suggest plot	Script	No script needed and form flexible so that form can be chosen both to meet the needs of child and content
Often begins with sense exploration/exercises often isolate senses/places emphasis on practical imitative meaning/may lead to performance attitute	Senses of Seeing Feeling Touching Hearing Smelling	Begins in the middle of a life experience. The life experience is considered the most important aspect of the drama/Places emphasis on metaphorical, non-imitative meaning
Often used as a prelude to Creative Drama/Pantomime exercise is often used as a concentration exercise with no other purpose than to develop concentration/highly geared toward performance	Pantomime	Used in situational drama only as an aid to appreciate the life experience

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
A basic sequence exercise often used with no specific goal in mind--geared toward performance	Movement	Movement grows out of the form of the material that is being worked on/no emphasis is placed on moving like a character
Used to gain a deeper understanding of material	Mood	Used to gain a deeper understanding of material--always used with purpose that is part of the material/Mood is normally used in the beginning exercise
Sequence drama uses character work to become or give the appearance of a character/Character work generally leads to performance	Character	Not generally used in improvisational drama--Normally attitudes are taken (role playing) child remains himself

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
Uses sotires, poems, pictures objects, etc., as a basis for the drama	Story Dramatization	Does not use story etc. Uses the imagination of the child to create a life experience
Many exercises may inhibit the use of language/Language may be limited to the material, e.g., story being worked on	Language	Demands the widest possible use of language
May be limited to simple sense excercises, e.g., pantomime, movement, etc.,/may be limited to replaying simple stereotype roles, e.g., "The Three Little Pigs."/It is often limited to simplistic ideas, again "The Three Pigs"/often the teacher presents the solution to problems presented within the material/material does not always demand solutions/ may	Thought	Demands divergent thought/ Calls for working from the general to the specific to the universal, e.g., General: basic situation and Specific: how must I work in situation Universal: What does it mean to basic living/in improvisational drama the child (not the teacher) must find solutions

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
lead to performance.		
A basic goal of sequence drama, although many of the games inhibit creativity	Creativity	Assumes all children are creative in their own way--demands creativity
Often related to working on one level of thinking e.g., concentration exercises	Levels of Thinking	In improvisational drama the child must operate on several levels of thinking to include the material, his relationship with the teacher, his self (relationship) and the group
Structure is for: sequence, clarity of material, shape, characterization, mood, group responsibility	Structure of the Drama	Structure is for: focus, universal meaning, problem solving, exploration, mood, group responsibility. Principal difference in improvisational drama is that the drama is structured as it proceeds

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
Action is essnetial--a feeling that all is not well unless a good deal of action and activity is present	Action	No pressure for action
Limited discussion in some situation--good in others/ djscussion limited to quality of material	Discussion	Discussion is essential, unlimited potential for reflection and generalizing from the drama
Often centered on teacher/teacher is often the prime mover	Center of Activity	Is always child centered/ although the teacher may role play a part in the drama
Teacher established goals at on-set. Goals are often those the teacher feels important for the child. Group goals are very important	Goals of Drama	There are always two sets of goals: Those for the child a those for the teacher. Drama leader uses child's suggestio to plan a course of action for drama.

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
		Children work for goals at their own development level. While group goals are important, teacher has freedom with individual child goals, e.g., working with shy child
Generally, not a threat to drama leader. Teacher gives limited freedom to child. Teacher may hide behind material, e.g., concentration exercises	Security of Teacher	Threat to teacher--security of teacher must be high. Teacher gives a good deal of freedom to child. Teacher often stands away from material and allows children to work alone
Limited--not a center of learning	Curriculum Potential	Unlimited potential
Uses games, which may promote a performance attitute toward drama	Theatre Games	Games are used, but when used they must logically relate to the drama

Sequence Drama	Subject	Improvisational Drama
Dependent upon imitation, not metaphors	Metaphorical Thinking	Demands use of metaphors. The drama is always seen as a symbol to the real world
Often limited by the material	Self Discovery	Since the drama is created by the situation, it places both the child and the teacher in a position where both must deal with problems in a more original way. The drama allows both to see the world in a fresh perspective
Often not related to the human condition	Ultimate Objective	By definition, working with the material that is basic to living

Improvisational drama involves all the elements of sequence drama, but it encourages a greater amount of creativity, thinking, commitment, and feeling. Futhermore, its objectives are not limited, but rather general and universal. The overall goal is to help the child deal with problems that are related to his or her own personal life and growth as a human being.

Improvisational drama looks at the present developmental level of each child and asks where that child can progress to from the present level. Such drama activities can serve as a learning tool for a myriad of academic disciplines. But more importantly, improvisational drama can assist the child in his or her relationship with others in his or her sense of self worth.

A Look at Tomorrow

Drama, in one form or another, has been with humankind since its beginning. People have used drama to assist in understanding the human condition. There is a growing acceptance in this country of drama as a tool in classroom learning. We appear to be on the threshold of recognizing children as human beings with an affective dimension of equal importance with the cognitive dimension. I believe that improvisational drama is an excellent way of helping children learn both about themselves and about their world. We are a universe of people who have difficulty in understanding the duality (personal and interpersonal) of our lives. Is there any reason why this exploration cannot begin with the very young?